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ABSTRACT

The tendency to think of a literary work as an object or entity existing apart from author and reader has been the greatest stumbling block in literary criticism and the teaching of literature. The transaction between a reader and a text involves the reader in a highly complex, ongoing process of selection and organization. Keeping the reader's active process of evocation of the work central will have important implications for questions raised and methods used in both teaching and research. However, little has been done to help the student assimilate the aesthetic mode of relating to a text. Students need to learn to select and handle both the referents of the verbal signs and what they trigger within themselves. More studies are needed on the actual literary transaction or reading event. There is also a need for research on the differences between aesthetic and efferent (e.g., nonaesthetic, expository, or nonfictional) reading, at all levels, and on the kinds of elements in a written or oral response that can be judged to reflect the inward-looking, synthesizing activities leading to the crystallization of a sense of "the work." In both content analysis and intuitive study of responses, it is important to recognize that various factors will have affected what is expressed as a response. As for teaching, research should focus on the transactional model, with its emphasis on the total situation in which the relationship with the text occurs. Moreover researchers must realize that the community, the ethos of the school, the total curriculum, and the cumulative emphases of the literary texts presented are settings for any encounter between a reader and a text in a classroom. (HOD)

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THE TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF THE LITERARY WORK:

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

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THE TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF THE LITERARY WORK: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Louise M. Rosenblatt

In the letter inviting me to participate in this Conference on Researching Response to Literature and the Teaching of Literature, the chairmen referred to Literature as Exploration (1938, 1968, 1976) and suggested that I might "take up some still-to-be-researched questions raised or implied in that volume." Confirming my view that what readers make of a text varies with the preoccupations brought to it, the preface of the third edition sketches some of the varying implications drawn from the book over the years. During that interval, I have also published various articles, some of them previews of parts of my forthcoming The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work. Obviously, the following pages cannot do justice to the many complex questions treated in that book. Yet the most expeditious way to follow the chairman's suggestion seems to be through a brief review of major aspects of my transactional theory and its development, as the basis for suggesting questions for further research, with some remarks on methodology. (I trust that I shall be pardoned references to these writings and the use of the first-person-singular in order to avoid the usual circumlocutions.)

Just to boggle the minds of the young and inspire the middle-aged, I

shall point out that Literature as Exploration was not my first book. In 1931, I published a study of the art for art's sake movement (L'Idée de l'art pour l'art, Paris: Champion), my dissertation for the doctorate in comparative literature at the University of Paris. This treated the theories developed by writers seeking to free themselves from the social, moral, and aesthetic constraints imposed by an uncomprehending society. In my concluding pages, I asked whether the solution was not to raise the level of the reading public "so that readers might participate fully in the poetic experience" and hence learn to appreciate the distinction between aesthetic and other modes of experience. And I referred to a recently-published work, Practical Criticism (1929), by one I. A. Richards.

Purves and Beach, in their 1972 survey of research, start by citing Richard's major pioneering work, and then proceed to comment on Literature as Exploration:

> Rosenblatt added to Richards' concentration on analyses of readers' comments an emphasis both on the process by which what the reader brings to the text interacts with its special character to result in his interpretation, and on the teaching process (p. 2).

And they report that the studies of response surveyed "tend to support the transactional theory" (p. 35).

As James Squire pointed out, Literature as Exploration appeared in the same year as Brooks and Warren's Understanding Poetry, which reflected Richards' analysis of the inadequacy of his students' readings by their "New Criticism" emphasis on the importance of normative "close" readings. The theories of the New Critics, which treated the poem as an hypostatized object to be analyzed, led, it is now a commonplace to point out, to the neglect of the author and the reader. I was--I cannot help phrasing it--saved from that development by my interest in both the "autonomy" of literary experience and the place of art in human society. On completion of

of my doctorate, I did two years of graduate work in anthropology with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict at Columbia University, where I was teaching English at Barnard College. After immersion in the philosophic origins of English, French and German romantic theory, I came under the influence of John Dewey, especially his Experience and Nature (1925) and his Art as Experience (1934). By the time I came to write Literature as Exploration, in which I presented a theory of literature as the basis for a philosophy of teaching, I was able to avoid the extremes of both aestheticism and moralism. It was possible to affirm the reader's contribution, the uniqueness of the literary experience, and yet recognize its social origins and potential social effects.

Transaction

My use of the term transaction stems from Dewey and Bentley's Knowing and the Known (1949). They selected this word in order to eliminate the dualistic overtones carried by the term interaction, which suggests a relation between two separate and distinct entities. As early as 1896, in his "Reflex Arc" article, Dewey had rejected the dualistic stimulus-response concept and had set forth his view of the two-way process by which the live creature selects out stimuli from the environment, thus creating it to some extent while responding to it. Dewey had sometimes used the term situation to suggest the reciprocal conditioning that the term transaction makes explicit. A known, for example, implies a knower, and vice versa. Within the past fifty years, both in America and in Europe, the old dualism has been progressively challenged by philosophers and scientists: the observer has come to be more and more generally viewed as entering into his observation. You are undoubtedly aware of the "distorted room" and other perception experiments developed by Adelbert Ames (1955) and Hadley Cantril (1963), which

demonstrated how much perception is dependent on the perceiver's contribution. They found Dewey's conceptual framework so congenial that they called themselves transactional psychologists. Current ecological concerns are another expression of the spread of the transactional mode of conceptualizing human life. (Bateson, 1972).

The Literary Transaction

The reader, the text, the poem. The transactional terminology seemed to me especially pertinent to the view of the relation between reader and text I had been espousing. An element of the environment (the words on a page) becomes a text of a poem by virtue of its particular relationship with the reader, who in turn is a reader by virtue of his relationship to the text. And at the same time the term transaction as I use it implies that the reader brings to the text a network of past experiences in literature and in life. (The author's text also is seen as resulting from a personal and social transaction, but that is a question for another discussion.) In the reading situation, the literary work that is evoked must be seen as a function of the two-way transaction of reader and text.

Post-Sputnik intellectualism and the dominant New Critical orthodoxy led to my article, "The Poem as Event" (1964), which opposed the New Critics' focus on normative readings of "the poem itself" as an hypostatized entity, and also rejected Northrop Frye's relegation of literary experience to the realm of history of "taste", as distinct from a supposedly objective "criticism." The tendency to think of "the work" as an object, an entity, existing somewhere apart from author and reader, has seemed to me the greatest stumbling block in literary criticism and the teaching of literature. Intent on impersonal analysis of that hypostatized object, the poem, the New Critic was not interested in the reader's response.

Moreover, there has been a confusion between the poem and the text: for example, teachers ask their pupils to "read the poem"; critics analyze the text and present it as analysis of "the poem." I have urged, and in this paper follow, the distinction in usage between the text, the set of signs capable of being interpreted as verbal symbols, and the poem, or work which a reader elicits in a transaction with the text. The poem--which here stands for any literary work of art--is not an object but an event, a lived-through process or experience.

Both reader and text active. The transactional theory, by its insistence on both elements of the transaction--the author and the text, or the reader and the text--avoids the formalist's banishment of author and reader but at the same time does not swing the pendulum to the other extreme of seeing "the poem" as a function only of the reader. The text may give rise to very different works in transaction with different readers, or with the same reader at different times. One need not accept the notion that there is a single "correct" reading (See Rosenblatt 1978, Chapter 5). Yet it is possible to decide that the work evoked by a reader is less or more relevant to the text: there are less or more defensible readings. Both text and reader must be taken into consideration, if one seeks to understand the factors that permit or block response to elements of the text, or that permit or block an organization or synthesis of the reader's responses to the pattern of words. Criteria of relevance, of consistency, of coherence, for example, would permit us to decide that one evocation "did greater justice to the text" than another reading of it. Similarly, my transactional theory takes into account the differences in texts, which vary greatly in the potentialities for response that they offer.

The reaction against the impersonality of the New Criticism has recently generated a rediscovery of the reader, but with an (understandable)

overemphasis on the reader's personality. I regret that some who seem open to that criticism have adopted a terminology similar to mine, referring to the literary "transaction" and to reading as "transactive." Since they treat the text as "passive" (Holland in conference, 1978) or "secondary" (Bleich, 1975), their view does not seem to me to do justice to the two-way interfusion required to produce a literary work of art.

Like the Rorschach inkblot, a verbal text may be used to stimulate personal, "free" associations and memories of childhood traumas. But this makes the text simply a passive tool in the psychological study of personality. The emphasis is then on free association, whereas when the text is read aesthetically, emphasis is on following the important guiding cues provided by the text. The whole matter cannot be dealt with here, but it should be recognized that such an emphasis on personality moves the discussion out of the realm of a primary concern for the literary transaction and the teaching of literature.

The text, as an active element in a reading process that produces a literary work of art, offers guidance and constraint, yet it is also open, requiring the creative contributions of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978, Chs. 4, 5). No metaphor or comparison does justice to this unique character of verbal art. A blueprint, a musical score suggest something of this combination of openness and constraint. Reading, when it is an aesthetic transaction, can be called a "performing art."

Efferent and Aesthetic Transactions

The transactional paradigm applies to all reading-events. The reader actively elicits meaning under guidance of the printed symbols, no matter whether a newspaper or the text of Woolf's To the Lighthouse. From the beginning, I have emphasized the difference between reading, say, a novel

and a social science text, and have been concerned with developing an explanation of what differentiates the aesthetic transaction--the evocation of a poem, a novel, a play--from other kinds of reading. (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1969, 1978). Aestheticians have, of course, expressed this general distinction in a variety of ways, some more acceptable than others, yet the heart of the matter for reading--what the reader does in these kinds of reading--seems to have been glossed over or at best only tacitly admitted.

In general, most weight has been placed on the text, the set of verbal symbols. The essence of the poetic or aesthetic is often attributed to the author's "poetic" or expressive language, to such linguistic details as the deviations from normal syntax or to imagery. Sometimes the essentially poetic is found in the content, such as Poe's ideal subject, the death of a beautiful woman. Obviously, as I have insisted, the text is important. Some texts will reward an aesthetic reading more than others. Yet the pop poets have been reminding us that the seemingly most mundane and refractory texts may become materials for poetry. The difficulty with looking only at the text, we must recall, is that any text, no matter what its author's intention, can be read either aesthetically or efferently, to use the term that, as I shall explain below, I apply to the nonaesthetic.

Those who emphasize one aspect of content, remoteness from "real life," fictionality or "aesthetic distance," also fail to isolate what is special to the verbal work of art. To express the contrast in terms of an opposition between "participation" in actual life and the "spectator role" in literature (Britton, 1970) is to use a metaphor that obscures the directly-experienced and dynamic character of the literary work. Moreover, the contrast with actual life applies to all kinds of reading; a scientific formula or an historical account is as much a way of looking on at actual life as is a story or a poem.

The focus of attention. The difference between these kinds of reading lies elsewhere--in what the reader does, where he turns his attention, within the context of the transaction with the text.

In efferent (nonaesthetic, expository, nonfictional, etc.) reading, the reader's attention is centered on what should be retained as a residue after the actual reading-event---the information to be acquired, e.g., from the label on a medicine bottle, or the operations to be carried out, as in a scientific experiment, or the actions to be performed, as in a recipe. I have sometimes thought of this as "instrumental" reading, but this criterion of practical purpose also breaks down. Hence I have chosen to call this kind of reading efferent, from the Latin *efferre*, to carry away. The reader's attention is focused on what he will take away from the transaction.

In the aesthetic transaction, the reader's selective attention is focused on what he is living through during the reading-event. He is attending both to what the verbal signs designate and to the qualitative overtones of the ideas, feelings images, situations, characters, that he is evoking under guidance of the text. The literary work of art comes into being through the reader's synthesis of the states of mind felt to be relevant to the text.* Any literary transaction will fall somewhere in the continuum between the aesthetic and the efferent poles.

* Where I use efferent, Britton (1970) uses transaction and transactional. Britton's association is evidently with practical "real life" affairs, as in "commercial transaction." He obviously is not thinking of the two-way process (a buyer implies a seller, and vice versa) as the reason for calling it a transaction. When I use transaction or transactional, I am indicating the reciprocal relationship in all reading events.

As I have indicated earlier, where Britton uses spectator role I use aesthetic stance. It is regrettable that in this field, as in others, terminological problems have arisen, especially since in many ways Britton reinforces and supports much that I have been saying since 1938. Britton seems to derive his terminology mainly from the point of view of the speaker and writer, another reason why his terminology does not fully take care of the aesthetic reading transaction.

The reader's creativity. The transaction between a reader and a text involves the reader in a highly complex ongoing process of selection and organization. We need not here pause to deal with the primary level of recognition of the symbols. As soon as we turn to the matter of lexical or semantic interpretation of the symbols, we find ourselves involved in consideration of "what the reader brings" to the text--his past linguistic, literary, and life experiences. The reader must select out from the multiple meanings and associations activated by the verbal symbols. He must sense cues as to the general stance to adopt--whether primarily efferent or aesthetic since this provides the basic principle of selection of what to pay attention to. He must sense some organizing principle or framework suggested by the opening verbal cues. This will guide him in his interpretation and organization of the further cues as the text unrolls before him. If elements appear that cannot be synthesized into the earlier framework, there may be revision or even a complete reversal and rereading.

For the efferent reading, of, say, a newspaper or a scientific work, another text, a paraphrase or restatement, or a summary by another reader, may serve. But for an aesthetic transaction, no one else can substitute and no other text can serve. The reader must himself select-out and synthesize the ideas, feelings, experiences that have been aroused for him by that particular set of verbal signs. Throughout, in the evocation of the poem or novel or play, there is a to-and-fro movement of attention between the words and the experienced, felt, meanings being elicited and organized. The poem "happens" during the aesthetic transaction. Recognition of the importance of the reader's stance, or focus of attention, in the aesthetic transaction is unfortunately lacking even in theoretical treatments that emphasize the reader (as, for instance, when scientific theories of the "real" or "truth" are applied to the notion of a cumulative consensus on

"the correct reading" of a novel.)

The poem not an object. This view of the literary work of art as the self-aware lived-through evocation in a transaction with a text rules out the notion of "the work of art" as an object. Conventionally, this term is used to refer to the physical painting or piece of sculpture, but even these are works of art only by virtue of the viewer. The customs officer may see only a taxable mass of metal; the viewer focused on the qualitative responses organized in his transaction with it may see Brancusi's Bird. It is easier to separate the text from the literary work of art, the poem, that the reader evokes as he organizes his experience.

The reader, then, is not passively receiving the imprint of an already-formed "object" encased in the text. Nor is the reader a distanced spectator. The feeling that he is looking on at the characters and situations of a novel does not contradict the fact that he has himself called forth those scenes according to the blueprint offered by the text. And he has had to draw on his own past experiences of language and of life to provide the raw materials for this new experience. Hence even when we feel ourselves onlookers at the characters and situations of a novel we are also participants, having ourselves created the scenes that unroll before us. The aesthetic transaction is not vicarious experience, not 'virtual' experience, but a special kind of experience in its own right.

The transactional concept of "the evocation" should save us from the fallacy of reducing the poem to merely a sum of the theoretical codings that can be applied to it. The Freudians would reduce it to the particular defenses or symbols of supposed unconscious drives that they find underlying a reading. The Marxians apply a similarly reductive type of analysis. The structuralists draw on the analogy with Saussurian linguistics to see the text as manifesting a particular set of codes, social, moral, literary, etc.

The linguists analyze the text as a set of phonemic, morphemic, syntactic patterns, as do some analysts of style. To the extent that any of these turn away from the lived-through experience to analytically or efferently apply a ready-made system to the text, they are concerned with something different from what I understand to be analysis of response to the poem as evocation. They are perhaps psychologists, bibliotherapists, semiologists, social or economic analysts and historians or linguists.

The literary transaction, as a form of human behavior, can be studied from the point of view of any discipline (Rosenblatt, 1976, Part III; 1978, ch. 7). But such analysis is useful only if it illuminates, places in a context, and does not destroy or ignore the lived-through structured evocation which the reader sees as the work of art corresponding to the text, and which he responds to both during and after the reading. Keeping the reader's active process of evocation of the work central--keeping the aesthetic transaction central--will have important implications for questions raised and methods used in both teaching and research.

Evocation and Response

It is now possible to refine our understanding of "response to literature." To what, in fact, do we respond? Often the term is used rather loosely to cover two processes--first, the aesthetic relationship to the text, and second, our response to the work that we are evoking. Hence, I prefer to speak of, first, <u>the evocation</u>--what we sense as the structured experience corresponding to the text--and second, <u>the response</u> to the evocation. In our transaction with Dicken's text, <u>Great Expectations</u>, for example, we evoke the characters of Pip and Joe, we participate in their relationship, and at the same time we respond, approving, disapproving, identifying with one or the other, seeing parallels in our own lives. Both

of these processes may be going on at the same time. Later reflections on the transaction can be seen as an effort (a) to recapture, to reenact the evocation, and (b) to organize and elaborate our ongoing responses to it. I shall return to these topics in considering specific problems for research.

Transactional Concepts

In a conference concerned with response to literature and the teaching of literature, clarification of the underlying theoretical mode is necessary, since it influences the questions we ask, the formulation of hypotheses, and the research methods used to test them. It affects the teaching situations we study and the criteria of evaluation we apply. Hence the importance of the distinctions I have been sketching:

> the concept of the two-way transaction between reader and text, as against the passive reader acted on by the text, or the passive text acted on by the reader;
>
> the concept of the efferent transaction, in which the reader's selective attention is focused on what he is storing up to retain after the reading;
>
> the concept of the aesthetic transaction, in which the reader's attention during the reading is focused on his lived-through evocation of the poem;
>
> the view of the literary transaction as a process in which the reader, under guidance of the text, selects out from his past linguistic, literary and life experience ideas, feelings, sensations, images that he synthesizes into a new experience, the poem or evocation;
>
> the concept of the response to the evocation, generated during and after the aesthetic transaction.

It has not been possible to do justice to these matters here, but merely to sketchily suggest the particular character of the transactional theory

that I have developed over the years, and to hope that answers to questions raised will be sought in my fuller presentations.

Implications for Research

An earlier statement concerning the development of sound research designs for our field, using the analogy with research in the physical sciences, sets forth the need for both "basic" research, e.g., in such areas as language acquisition, and "applied" research, centered on the effectiveness of teaching methods in the classroom (Rosenblatt, 1963, pp. 11-37). Many of the problems cited there remain to be treated, although there have been important developments in linguistics and semiology. In what follows here, I shall, for purposes of compression, suggest the implications of the transactional theory for both basic and applied aspects of research. My purpose is mainly to indicate line of thought out of which emerge questions calling for both kinds of research. The very shift toward interest in the nature of the reader's response, as against the emphasis simply on analysis of the text, reflects the changed view of effectiveness in teaching.

Since many of those now engaging in such research were themselves probably subjected to approaches based on the assumption that the literary work was an "object" to be analyzed and categorized, with a "correct" interpretation to be assimilated, they need to make explicit the implications of the transactional view. (Rosenblatt 1976, 1978). This calls on the teacher to create an atmosphere fostering personal responses freely exchanged. Not only increasingly full evocations from the text but also increased self-understanding are envisioned. One aim is clarification of the social and aesthetic assumptions implied in the evoked work in the light of the assumptions brought to the text by the readers. The teacher's awareness of his own attitudes helps to avoid indoctrination of the students, who can thus be helped to

become aware of, and choose among, alternative views of human nature, of society, of aesthetic and social values.

Problems of language development. My emphasis on the reader's activity in relation to texts is reinforced by psycholinguists' studies of children's acquisition of language. Studies by Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1928) suggest that in the initial process of semantic attribution for a word form, there is hardly any boundary at all between the sphere of reference and an associative network. (Note that "word form" is used rather than "word" since that may represent a variety of processes.) The early utterance of a word form that at a later stage may be purely referential--"Doll!", for example--may be translated by adults in a variety of ways, expressive of emotion as well as referential. The characteristic feature of such early stages of the word form, it is suggested, is that the word uttered represents "a peculiar fusion of processes which will later branch off into referential, emotive, and associative part processes. Thus, the initial sphere of reference [of the word] will be indistinguishable [for the child] from the associative network of the word. Emotive meaning will fuse with such mixed referential-associative processes, moreover, until affective response patterns are singled out as distinctively internal, expressive components of global affective-sensory-motor patterns." (Rommetveit, 1968, p. 167)

In short, the child has to learn to sort out the various components of the "meaning" a word carries for him. There is not only the narrowing of the denotative domain of the word but also awareness of the distinction between what the word refers to and its "associative network." Efferent and aesthetic reading are made possible by the reader's awareness of the different dimensions of what the verbal signs in a text activate for him, the difference between, to use the psycholinguists' terminology, the referential and the associative processes activated by the text. The adult's

capacity to engage in the tremendously complex processes of either efferent or aesthetic reading depends ultimately on the child's development of habits of selective attention to these various components of meaning.

Factors affecting aesthetic capabilities. As this is being written on Columbus day, I was reminded of the first grader whose teacher told the class to learn the following verses:

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two
Columbus crossed the ocean blue.

When called on the next day, the youngster recited:

In fourteen hundred and ninety-three
Columbus crossed the dark blue sea.

Questioned as to why she had changed it, she simply said that she liked it better that way.

Now, I submit that this represents a problem in stance. The teacher had wanted her to read efferently, in order to retain the date "1492." She had read aesthetically, paying attention to the qualitative effect, to her own responses, not only to the image of the ship crossing the sea, but also to the sound of the words in her ear, and in this instance the discomfort evidently occasioned by the reversal of the normal adjective-noun order.

A scholar making the point about the need for suspended judgment told about an eight-year-old who objected, "But rabbits don't carry watches!" The scholar replied, "Shut up! in this story they do," and he went on reading. The boy was simply listening efferently, and his critical thinking was entirely appropriate for that kind of stance. He had somehow not learned, or had lost, or had been given the wrong cue as to, the appropriate (aesthetic) stance. He should have been living in the experience evoked from the words, perhaps even delightedly savoring the unorthodoxy of this rabbit. The scholar was depending entirely on the text to force the aesthetic stance.

That is precisely the question to be explored. How does the child learn to adopt the aesthetic stance toward the spoken or written word? To what extent do environmental pressures lead the child to focus attention on the efferent, practical function of language and to push into the fringes of consciousness the rich affective aura that no one doubts does persist? Is the "literal-minded adult" merely the extreme product of this pressure?

More specifically, do language activities in the schools, the oral as well as writing and reading, push the child mainly in this nonaesthetic direction? My favorite illustration is a reading workbook that prefaced the first poem presented in its pages (a poem about a cow) by the question: "What facts does this poem teach you?" The reader was clearly being asked to adopt a nonaesthetic stance, to pay attention to what was to be retained after the reading. This would not permit the kind of experienced meaning that derives from attention to a synthesis of sound, image, and ideas. How many potentially aesthetic texts--poems, stories--are used in this way for the purpose of teaching efferent reading? How often does the preliminary emphasis foster neglect of all but the information that will be required at the end of the reading? (Recall the series edited by a linguist, that used "classic" poems as the texts for analyzing and demonstrating grammatical concepts.)

The kinds of questions that teachers ask has been a subject for study for some time. But so far as I know little has been done to test my view that most questions in texts and in classrooms (and many also in research projects) turn the young reader's attention away from the lived-through poem toward an efferent reading and analysis of the text. (See Ehrenkranz, 1972, on non-directed, cognitive and affective questions.)

It becomes important to inquire about the kinds of situations (home, classroom, social climate, etc.), the kinds of strategies (teaching methods,

dramatizations, writing), the kinds of texts, that can contribute to the child's development of the habit of attention to the qualitative character of what the text triggers within him. At what point can the young reader be helped to adopt either the efferent or the aesthetic stance toward what he elicits from a text? When and how can he learn the circumstances, the "purpose", of the reading that makes one or the other stance appropriate? When and how can he be helped to respond to the cues offered by the text for one or another stance? In the study of the child's acquisition of language, we need to be concerned with the varied personal and social experiences, the sensuous richness, provided by the environment as the basis for sensitivity to the nuances of the spoken and written language.

The problem of the development of aesthetic capabilities is extremely complex, even when delimited to the verbal arts. Both short-range and longitudinal studies are needed. Howard Gardner (1973) has made a brave beginning, but in his effort to cover all the arts he has created a general model that seems very unsatisfactory so far as aesthetic reading is concerned. Because it is not a transactional model, he does not recognize that the reader, i.e., the evoker, of a poem from a text is not simply an "audience" but much more a "performer" (Rosenblatt, 1976, Scruton, 1977).

The questions that I have been raising are, of course, pertinent to all levels, elementary, secondary and beyond. My reference to the beginner was largely a means of suggesting that we are indeed dealing with a subject that has important implications for the total language and literature curriculum. The traditional emphasis has been on the text and, implicitly, on efferent reading. The efferent stance--the kind of reading appropriate to a legal brief or an economics text--has generally been the concern of reading teachers. The relating of word to referent, the discounting of irrelevant personal associations and emotions--critical reading--has to be

learned. Little has been done to help the student assimilate also the aesthetic mode of relating to a text. The student needs to learn to select out and handle both the referents of the verbal signs and what they trigger within him. The student needs to learn to savor the sound, the personally-felt overtones of words, the qualitative shades of meaning. He needs to learn to acquire the operations signaled by figurative language. He needs to become familiar with literary conventions. In other words, it is not enough simply to present 'literary' texts to the student; he has to acquire the ability to focus attention fully on the structure of image, idea, feeling, attitude that he organizes under guidance of the text.

Linguists emphasize the extent to which the child intuitively derives from his environment command of the structure of the language on which the school can build. There is required similar interest in, and reinforcement of, the child's acquisition of habits of linguistic performance required for the evocation of a poem or story or play from a text. Research is needed to accumulate some systematic understanding of favorable and unfavorable environmental factors, the relation of cognitive and emotional development to the development of aesthetic capabilities, and the relation between these and traditional ideas concerning literary "skills."

Research on the Process of Evocation

As Purves (1972, 1973), Cooper (1973), and others point out, the data in research on response are always in some form indirect. The response is always being reported by the reader, and usually after the event. "Response," we have seen, involves some kind of abstraction or crystallization of a sense of the lived-through evocation. Hence it becomes especially important to make clear precisely what is being studied. It seems necessary to look at any report or research design to clarify what is meant by ref-

erences to "response to the work," what concept of "the work" is embedded in the study. Some studies would be as applicable, or perhaps more applicable, to efferent reading. What evidence is there that the reading has been aesthetic? That a literary work of art, as against a piece of information, or an act of classification, has resulted? To what are the responses directed? Different readers of the same text are not necessarily responding to the same "work."

We need to delve more deeply than has thus far been done into the processes by which the reader creates the poem or story or play out of the cues offered by the text. James R. Squire's study (1956) is important not only as a pioneering work on response to stories but also because it deals with activities going on <u>during</u> the actual reading, the actual evocation of the story. His method was to interrupt the reader at set intervals to allow free responses. Instead of accepting the reader's production of the work as a <u>fait accompli</u> and concentrating on his later reflections on it, we need many more studies centered on the actual literary transaction or reading-event.

From 1948 to 1972, I was able to carry on quite systematic study of students' transactions with texts, repeating some texts year after year with what came finally to be hundreds of students, and utilizing various ways of learning about their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes the reader simply started to make jottings as soon as possible after encountering the text and wrote whenever there was a pause, a break, a hesitation, a need to look back, to synthesize, etc. On other occasions, there were oral comments as the transaction unfolded. Sometimes records were kept of repeated readings. Interchange among readers, who tended to point to parts of the text in support of different evocations or different judgments, revealed much about the linguistic habits, literary expectations, and social

assumptions brought to transactions with the same text. My 1964 article on "The Poem as Event" developed some of the results of my observations. Using as illustrations the jottings of one group as they encountered a quatrain by Robert Frost, I outlined the process of organizing the ideas, feelings, and associations triggered by the words of the text. My 1978 book elaborates this model and its implications for criticism.

Commenting on implications for the reading teacher and reading research of my "transactional model" as outlined in 1969, Joanna Williams (1971, pp. 7-158) suggests that it would require qualification of the kinds of strategies recommended by Goodman (1970) in his "miscue analysis". Actually, his approach, and that of Frank Smith (1971), with their emphasis on the importance of what the reader brings to the text, support my view (1938, 1969) of the process by which the reader organizes understandings generated by the text. However, "miscue analysis", as Goodman notes, applies principally to efferent reading; he recognizes that the strategies of the aesthetic reader differ. The substitution of synonyms suggested by the context would have a different implication and, as Williams remarks, would require a different handling. But, just as the miscue analysts are concerned with discovering the general framework created by the reader, so it should be possible to work out ways of uncovering the process by which the aesthetic reader settles on a tentative framework within which to interpret the sequence of words. The psycholinguists are starting to ask important questions, and their work should be helpful, <u>if</u> we do not forget that they have tended to be concerned with efferent transactions.

Here, again, we return to the need for research on the differences between aesthetic and efferent reading, at all levels. Studies might be made of the strategies involved in aesthetic and efferent transactions with the same text. The effect of varied cues, visual and verbal, that lead to

the adoption of one or the other stance should be analyzed. We recognize the importance of visual clues for signalling the aesthetic stance, for example, when a newspaper item is segmented as a piece of "found poetry." We have many analyses of the complex verbal patterns embodied in texts, but we know little about how readers attend to them or how they organize their responses to the verbal cues. The use of simple, fairly brief texts seems indicated, because of the complexity of the processes involved. It is apparent that such studies would very quickly involve the need to analyze the role of what the reader brings to the text, in terms of past linguistic, literary, and life experiences, assumptions and expectations.

Research on Response

I have stressed the importance of devising strategies for studying the actual process of organizing a sense of "the work" because our "response" begins and continues during the reading (Rosenblatt, 1978, Ch. 4). We respond to the work that we are evoking. Further reflection on our response after the transaction involves a reexperiencing, a reenacting of the evocation and an elaborating and ordering of our ongoing responses to it.

Alan Purves has made perhaps the major contribution to research on response, through his direction and report on the international investigation into responses of students (1973), his survey of research on literature and the reader (Purves and Beach, 1972), and his editing of the journal, Research in the Teaching of English, to mention only a few of the major items. The publication of The Elements of Writing about a Literary Work (1968) undoubtedly represents one of the most important stimuli to the increasing research on literary response. It provided a coherent method of analysis of student's written (or oral) reports of their reading of literary texts.

Its usefulness is demonstrated by the number of research projects that utilize it. The Purves schema will surely continue to provide an important common framework for various types of analysis.

Research on process. As Odell and Cooper (1976, p. 204) have pointed out, the Purves schema, depending on content analysis, needs further refinement, to provide a basis for moving into research focusing on "the processes by which students formulate their responses." Cooper (1976, p. 80) suggests subgroupings of the main categories. There could be further functional groupings of the coded elements, it seems to me, to reveal aspects of the relationship between reader and text. Just as I indicated earlier the need to study the strategies of the reader as he evokes a "work" from the text, so processes of handling and organizing his response to that evocation should be studied.

Part of the strength of Purves' work lies in the care with which he frames his findings and clarifies the lacks as well as the important gains made by him and others in the field. Thus he points out the need to study "the relationships among the various aspects of response" (Purves and Beach, 1972, p. 178). Squire (1956, 1964) found a correlation between expressions of personal involvement and literary judgment, for example, in response to stories. We need, surely, to understand more clearly the relation between involvement and perception, or involvement and technical analysis.

Studies should be made of the kinds of elements in a written or oral response that can be judged to reflect the inward-looking synthesizing activities leading to the crystallization of a sense of "the work." We need clarification of what the reader perceives as the existential "work" as distinguished from analytic references to, say, the sonnet form or recurrent imagery. It makes a great difference if such references result

from, or to phrase it operationally, occur in the context of, for example, an effort to understand the sources of an ambivalent feeling generated by the text. Such concern for context would result in what might be called functional groupings of the coded elements. Coding of indications of aesthetic as against efferent activities would probably cut across some of the Purves categories, such as "Perception." Perhaps a category such as "Evocation" might be set up to code responses reflecting a qualitative sense of the lived-through work.

Work in propaganda analysis between 1942 and 1945 gave me a sense of the limitations as well as the possibilities of both content analysis and "intuitive" study as ways of eliciting meaning and "intelligence" or information from texts. Hence the importance, increasingly recognized, of combining both types of approach. Research designs for study of response under my direction have included both systematic analysis of multiple elements present in the responses of appropriately-selected groups, and also intuitive study in depth of full individual responses (Ehrenkranz, 1972; Faggiani, 1971).

Content analysis has been reinforced by increasingly sophisticated statistical techniques. The tendency is to think of statistical findings as a check on intuitive observations. The checking of the statistical by intuitively-acquired knowledge should be even more important, involving as much as possible whole responses or protocols, the personality, and the conditions or situation that provide the impetus and manner of the responses. The simplest checking, of course, would involve interpreting the statistical content-analysis findings in the light of an intuitive reading of appropriately-selected whole written or oral responses. "Case studies" offer another dimension, sometimes providing hypotheses for broader investigation or the opportunity to test the insights derived from

other methodologies. Even more important than methodological cross-checking is the bringing of the fullest possible sense of the total human situation and all factors that may feed into the literary transactions. An important aspect of that kind of intuitive interpretation of results of research on response should be reflection on their implications for teaching.

Research on Teaching

Factors affecting expressed responses. In both content analysis and intuitive study of responses, it seems very important to recognize that various factors will have affected what is expressed as a response. As I have watched succeeding generations of freshmen enter college--or for that matter, succeeding generations of English majors as beginning teachers--I have been struck by changes in their assumptions about what in the literary transaction should be attended to. These changes reflected changes in teaching methods in the earlier grades, changes in the dominant theories of literature, and changes in the social climate. At present, it becomes essential that any research on response take into account the fact that the reader will reflect earlier indoctrination about what to note and talk about.

It also is essential that the researcher on response become aware of any theoretical bias on his own part that might exert pressure on the character of the reader's response, or that might emphasize one aspect and neglect others. The most obvious illustration is the New Criticism's neglect of the reader's response and emphasis on analytic skills. The current reaction against the supposed objectivity of the New Criticism may be leading to an equally biased overemphasis on feeling, the search for childhood memories, etc. We need also to keep in mind the danger of a

certain circularity in any research approach based on acceptance of, rather than a testing of, a particular closed or imputed explanatory system, whether psychological, social, or economic. In research, as in teaching, the danger is that the investigator will indoctrinate the subject with the very concepts or elicit the very activities that should constitute the hypotheses to be tested.

In investigations dependent on the psychoanalytic schema, for example, the assumptions concerning the defense mechanism or the role of fantasy tend to be self-fulfilling, and to fail to do justice to the aesthetic aspect (Crews, 1975). I can do no more here than suggest the presence of such reservations. Hence my espousal of the relatively open transactional view of the human creature, shaping and being shaped in a two-way relationship with the environment choosing, rejecting, as well as assimilating (Dewey, 1931; Piaget, 1970). Such a theoretical base, it seems to me, offers much more opportunity for discovery of the many facets of the literary transaction. (This does not imply that we should ignore the potential contributions that depth psychology, for example, offers, so long as we recognize that there are various ways of envisaging the dynamics of human personality.)

Bibliotherapy vs. teaching. Although my approach is sometimes cited in support of research on bibliotherapeutic uses of literary works (Leedy, 1969; Shrodes, 1949; Amato, 1957), I see this use as primarily clinical, dealing with a level of personality that can be handled only in a most superficial way in schools as we know them by teachers who are not trained therapists. It would be unfortunate if teachers were given the impression that recognition of the reader necessarily requires them to engage in such probing. Research on students' responses during and after their transactions with texts involves the personality (Rosenblatt, 1976, Chs. 7, 8, and passim), but it can be on a different level, more relevant to the

teaching situation, and for the study of different, continuing, developmental patterns.

A narrow focus on the personality of the reader viewed in terms of a formula obscures the total literary transaction in its cultural context. The difficulty that the psychoanalytic observer has in finding a way to move from the "holistic" study of individuals to generalizations about literary transactions evidently results from this lack. Just as language is socially-developed and individually-internalized, so the evocation of a literary work of art must be seen both in its social and its personal aspects. The uniqueness of each transaction--the uniqueness of each reader and of each evocation--need not obscure the role of language as communication or the literary transaction as a link between reader and author, on the one hand, and, on the other, a link between reader and reader (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). The literary transaction in itself may become a self-liberating process, and the sharing of our responses may be an even greater means of overcoming our limitations of personality and experience. Therefore, the importance for research of keeping the transactional model open to the whole range of possible psychological and cultural hypotheses.

Problem areas. Research on teaching especially is in need of the transactional model, with its emphasis on the total situation in which the relationship with the text occurs. I have already alluded to problems of linguistic and aesthetic development, which should be seen in their broadest social and educational contexts. Some other problem areas: methods of creating an atmosphere or setting favorable to spontaneous response; the role of the teacher; the process of group interchange; the assimilation of literary conventions; the relationship between written and spoken language, between the different linguistic processes in speaking, writing, and reading; fostering the aesthetic stance in writing and in reading; de-

veloping concepts of what constitutes growth in quality of transactions with texts; selection of texts to present to students in the light of the knowledge of the reader's personality, interests, and literary and life experience.

Obviously, we must seek insight at whatever point research is feasible. But the time has come to hope for longitudinal studies covering the range from the beginning to adolescence of various aspects of linguistic development. I have emphasized the need to study the acquisition of habits of aesthetic attention. One area that suggests itself is the acquisition of ability to handle figurative language. Given the complexity of our problems, interrelated group studies (something that the individualistic competitiveness of some doctoral and research programs makes it hard to realize) could make an important contribution. Focused on a problem area such as those I have mentioned, each investigator would approach the problem or aspect of the problem from a particular angle or at a particular academic or age level. The division of labor might be along the lines of different types of specialized expertise--sociological, psychological, linguistic--the assumption being that everyone engaging in research on literary transactions would bring to it a rich literary experience and a feeling for its role in individual lives. Such group cooperation would permit the study of the total situation in which the literary transactions take place, and of developmental sequences.

The social and cultural setting. Perhaps my interest in anthropology constitutes a bias, yet the anthropologist's recognition that any human behavior must be seen in the broader cultural context seems especially relevant to research on literary transactions, which are always events in a particular time and place. The community, the ethos of the school, the total curriculum, the cumulative emphases of the literary texts presented

(Sherwin, 1954) are settings for any encounter between a reader and a text in a classroom. Moreover, any research is carried on by individuals with particular experience and particular assumptions in a particular situation. The questions we raise, our research designs, and our interpretations of our findings will benefit from such a perspective. We need to reflect on where a problem fits into broader questions about the development of individual human capacities and the role of verbal arts in our society and in other human cultures. Such considerations will make for research, both basic and applied, conducive to the development of the kinds of teaching that will foster the capacity for more and more rewarding transactions between reader and texts.

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